

Vermont Farmer Profiles



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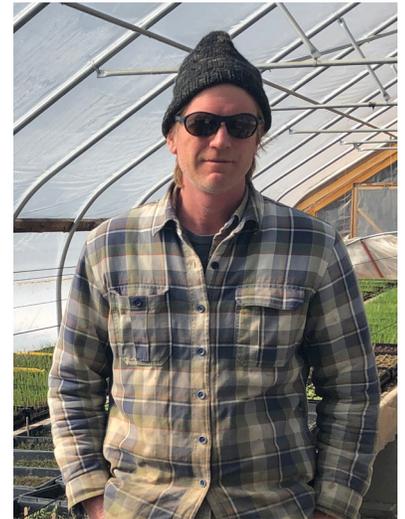
Profile: Elmer Farm

growing for a large community means protecting soils from radical wind and rain

Elmer Farm is a 30-acre vegetable farm owned and run by Spencer Blackwell. Spencer is a first-generation vegetable farmer who grew up in Montpelier, Vermont. He was drawn to farming because he always loved being outside and working outdoors. Spencer grows 40 different types of vegetables on Elmer Farm, selling exclusively in Middlebury. His main focus is always on soil health. Elmer Farm is certified organic and uses absolutely no pest control. He maintains good soil health by using different soil types, including Vergennes and Elmwood. Vergennes is a clay-type soil that drains less than Elmwood, a sandy soil, making the combination of the two important.

Unfortunately, like most farmers, Spencer has been negatively affected by radical weather changes that have taken place in recent years. Harsh windstorms will often blow greenhouses apart and ruin crop growth taking place inside. Recent dry spells have made it difficult to maintain healthy soil. Bare soil exposed to harsh, dry weather conditions can be damaged due to the oxidation of carbon, causing the soil health to decline quickly. Intense rainfall can also damage any bare soil by causing soil erosion which has made the recent increase in rainfall a struggle for many farmers.

Luckily, Spencer has adapted practices to help lessen the damages of intense weather. He makes sure to constantly keep his soil covered, minimizing its exposure to harsh weather as much as possible. Of course, keeping acres of healthy soil covered uses a large quantity of mulch, so Spencer has been trying to switch to types of soil that resemble grazing grounds to keep soil as healthy as possible. He also makes sure to only grow to the capacity of his farm and applies crop rotation.



Photos: (top) Inside a high tunnel at Elmer Farm (bottom) Spencer Blackwell inside one of his high tunnels. Photos used with permission